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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE HIGHER LEARNING IN AMERICA. By Thorstein Veblen. New York: B. W. Huebsch.

Veteran politicians, experienced men of affairs, to say nothing of other profound students of human nature (by no means to be placed in the same ethical class), such as tramps and charlatans, are wont to boast at odd moments that they "Know things that are not in any book"; and the complacency with which such pronouncements are for the most part received points to a somewhat general skepticism as to the competency of the book-taught mind to reveal essential truths.

The popular notion that books are not as a rule saturated with the kind of truth that is most immediately wanted is perhaps not altogether an error. Doubtless the condition complained of is not due in any degree to timidity on the part of those authoritative persons who know best, nor to any discreditable motive on the part of anyone. The fact remains, however, that one may become exceedingly well read in the authoritative and polite literature of the times without learning much about life, unless, to be sure, one has acquired somehow an ability to read between the lines. And it is, moreover, true, as the common sense of the majority of men attests, that little relief is to be had by turning to those books which are ostensibly most ingenuous and outspoken, since these books are too often the work of extremists, doctrinaires, or otherwise indifferently responsible writers.

The result is that persons—especially young persons—are prone to have recourse to fiction, and particularly to the newer fiction, as a means of satisfying a quite natural craving for that alleged "knowledge of life" which appears so difficult to get elsewhere, except indeed through a heart-to-heart talk with the "man who knows."

But so far as it touches upon institutions rather than upon the common frailties of mankind, the satire embodied in the newer fiction is but an unsatisfactory substitute for scientific analysis. It is a safe conjecture that the somewhat burlesque representations of college life contained, for example, in Earnest Poole's *The Harbor* and in Sinclair Lewis's *Trail of the Hawk*, have added not a little to the interest and popularity of the tales in question. The like is true of the exquisite and (from a literary point of view) far more legitimate characterization of a would-be college president in Henry Sydney Harrison's *Queed*. These things amuse us chiefly because of a suspicion that they represent, though in a one-sided manner, real conditions. We would not care to read this kind of criticism if we did not secretly

feel that our most cherished institutions, like Launcelot Gobbo's father, do, after all, "something smack, something grow to, have a kind of taste" of the qualities more or less playfully ascribed to them. And yet this kind of institutional satire is little more than a rather aimless telling of tales out of school. The thing is perhaps worth doing; but it seems reasonable to hope that, if there is anything in it, it may be done in some better way.

To compare in point of interest such fictional criticism of college life with a perfectly serious passage from Thorstein Veblen's recently published book upon the higher learning in America, may be worth while. "It is toward the outside, in the face of the laity out of doors," writes Mr. Veblen, "that the high fence—'the eight-fold fence'—of scholarly pretension is to be kept up. Hence the indicated means of its up-keep are such as will presumably hold the (transient) respect and affection of this laity—quasi-scholarly homiletical discourse, frequent, voluminous, edifying and optimistic; ritualistic solemnities, diverting and vacant; spectacular affectations of (counterfeit) scholastic usage in the way of droll vestments, bizarre and archaic; parade of (make-believe) gentility; encouragement and (surreptitious) subvention of athletic contests; promulgation of (presumably) ingenuous statistics touching the volume and character of the work done." Elsewhere Mr. Veblen, after scrupulously careful deliberation, describes the typical university executive as "in some sort an itinerant dispensary of salutary verbiage."

These quotations, though necessarily somewhat misleading when removed from their context, may serve to show that in raciness and vigor of expression, as in apparent candor, Mr. Veblen is far superior to the run of fictional satirists. As a matter of fact, his dry and precise style makes all ordinary irony seem by comparison clumsy and ineffectual, while his magnificent phlegm reduces most criticism of the kind called "bold" or "indiscreet" to the relative condition of tentative or peevish fault-finding. Unintentionally, no doubt, Mr. Veblen approaches more nearly the manner of Jonathan Swift than does any other contemporary writer. He might, indeed, be not inaccurately described as a modern, scientific Swift, dispassionate instead of bitter.

So much for the manner, but what of the substance? "*Communia maledicta*," as Bacon says, "is nothing much"; and the saying holds true no less for simple vituperation aimed at institutions or types than for that which is directed at individuals.

Of the justice of Mr. Veblen's arraignment of the universities, every reader must, of course, judge for himself. The reviewer feels warranted in saying this: that *The Higher Learning in America* bears all the marks of being one of those rare books which contain such truth as seldom finds its way into print—truth such as results from genuine experience intrepidly thought out, truth such as in the nature of the case *cannot* by the generality of writers be expressed with sufficient candor and at the same time with sufficient philosophy to make it either safe or acceptable. Here is the *whole* case against the universities, including some of the colloquial expressions (verging, it must be confessed, upon scurrillity) of a suppressed body of opinion; the whole case set forth with so comprehensive a grasp, with so im-

partial an eye to the working of cause and effect, that in the end no one is judged, no one need feel offended, no one has anything to quarrel with except facts (said to be capable of documentary proof when not notoriously true) and a perfectly impersonal, logically constructed conception of the relation of the universities to modern civilization in America.

Other books of Mr. Veblen's have been from time to time noticed in these pages. The fault found with these treatises (when any fault could be found) was simply that the author presented the "drift of events" as a fatally determined chain of causation, without any acknowledgment of purpose on his own part or any admission that the fatal chain might be in any way modified by a grasp of the ideas he was himself engaged in setting forth; the truth being that though events be fatally determined, our conscious thoughts are links in the chain, and, being such links, are at the same time our purposes; so that to deny purpose is to give up the possibility of thinking intelligibly (in the last analysis), and to encourage that false fatalism which resolves *not* to think.

Whether this criticism be just or not, it has no special application to the work under consideration. In this book, Mr. Veblen simply points out the obvious fact that the higher learning is the very core of our civilization. "For good or ill, civilized men have come to hold that this matter-of-fact knowledge of things is the only end in life that indubitably justifies itself. So that nothing more irretrievably shameful would overtake modern civilization than the miscarriage of this modern learning, which is the most valued spiritual asset of civilized mankind." He then proceeds to show what the fate of the higher learning in the hands of the universities is likely to be. The reader may draw his own conclusions, purposeful or not.

As an illustration of the lucidity of thought to which so impersonal a view may lead, one may cite the author's conclusion in regard to the long continued and fruitless controversy that has been carried on, under pressure of business influences, about the practical value of higher—i.e., of university, not college—education. "Pushed* by this popular prejudice, and themselves drifting under compulsion of the same prevalent bias, even the seasoned scholars and scientists—Matthew Arnold's 'Remnant'—have taken to heart this question of the use of the higher learning in the pursuit of gain. Of course, it has no such use, and the many shrewdly designed solutions of the conundrum have necessarily run out in a string of sophistical dialectics. The place of disinterested knowledge in modern civilization is neither that of means to private gain, nor that of an intermediate step in 'the roundabout process of the production of goods.'"

The case is really as simple as that of the Emperor's Clothes. To be sure, a child could see that the emperor had no clothes, though older people remained under the illusion of habitual pretense. To see that the higher education has really no "practical" value requires something more than a child's intuition. It requires, nowadays, a superior talent for straight thinking.

Others have pointed out the preposterous mixture of idealism and worship of business success which is characteristic of modern civilization everywhere and especially in America. No one has

brought the essential idea so effectively to bear upon any concrete problem as has Mr. Veblen upon the problem of the higher education. It is the intrusion of business ideals and business methods upon the true and professed interests of the university everywhere—in the governing boards, in the academic administration, in the work of the executive and of the teachers—that is doing the mischief. And this intrusion is so natural a result of the whole social system under which we live that it seems unavoidable.

Mr. Veblen is dispassionate, but his thought has a heat much more powerful to melt away obstacles than those more or less factitious bursts of indignation that are often supposed to accomplish this result. His book, unhopeful as it is in tone and intent, will certainly not be without an ultimate effect in bringing about a different state of affairs—which may or may not, according to Mr. Veblen's philosophy, be an improvement.

ARCHITECTURE AND DEMOCRACY. By Claude Bragdon. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

The ancient faith that the "book of power" is ultimately of more value than any precise, provisional formulation of certified knowledge, or any formally correct application of accepted logic to generally approved ends, holds its ground in spite of the deserved disrepute into which mere emotional appeals, edifying discourses, or random suggestions of mystery have nowadays generally fallen. Modern literary opinion strives (somewhat half-heartedly, it is true) to eliminate the psychopath and the charlatan, while it clings with a certain integrity of mind to the doctrine that a book of genius is in all cases of more value than it can immediately be proved to possess.

Men used to say that books of power were inspired; we now prefer to say, with much the same intent, that they are sincere and original. Just what we mean by "originality" is rather less easy for us to say than it was for our forefathers to tell what they meant by "inspiration." A rough working definition of original thought would perhaps be: Original thought is thought in which *all* the forces of a man's nature work in a harmonious and unimpeded manner toward the accomplishment of an end not clearly foreseen. This is in general accord with Professor Ladd's illuminating dictum, "Thinking is a matter of the whole man;" while at the same time it may serve to distinguish the prized quality of originality from the humdrum labor of research and from the mere enthusiasm of camouflaged propagandism.

It naturally follows that the book of power is sometimes a curiously uneven fusion of various elements, among which gold and clay may frequently be distinguished in strange juxtaposition. And so there is no inherent contradiction in saying that while Claude Bragdon's book, *Architecture and Democracy*, is one of the best, one of the most potent, books, on architecture or anything else, that have recently come to light, it is also a somewhat puzzling mixture of intuitive truth, doubtful speculation, and obvious sentiment. The like is true of Rousseau's *Emile*!

The distinction between "arranged" and "organic" architecture is not, indeed, by any means new, nor is the idea that architecture is a